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Holiday Fire Safety

With the winter holidays on the way, one of the best gifts you can give your family is a safe home. Here are some tips from the State Fire Marshal's Office:

- **Pick a "safe" tree.** If you buy a cut tree for Christmas, check for freshness. Look for good green color and needles that are hard to pull from the branches and do not break. Shedding, brittle needles and a faded green color are signs of a dry tree. Keep your tree fresh by placing it in a stand that holds water. Check the water level every day.
- **Choose "Fire Resistant"-labeled artificial trees and decorations.** This does NOT mean these items won't catch fire—it does mean that they should resist burning and extinguish fairly quickly in the event of fire.
- **Pick a safe place for your tree.** Keep your tree out of traffic areas and away from doorways—*exits should always be clear*. Also, make sure there's a "safety zone" all around your tree—at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, wood stoves and other heat sources (candles included).
- **Don't overload circuits.** With the extra lights and holiday decorations, don't be tempted to plug too many items into your outlets. Electrical overloads are among the most common causes of fires in the home. Unplug items that aren't in use, and **never** ignore a tripped fuse.

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- **Before the lights go up:** Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Don't forget to check your extension cords, too. Throw out any damaged lights or cords.
- **Whether indoor or outdoor lights,** use only lights that have been **UL®-approved**.
- **Never run extension cords** through doorways, under rugs, or through any high-traffic areas. This can damage the insulation and wire inside, causing a fire hazard.
- **Always disconnect all decorative lights** before you go to bed or leave the house.
- **Don't hang light strings** in any way that might damage the cord's insulation. Never use nails or tacks. Use only insulated staples to hold strands in place, or run the strings through hooks.
- **Be careful with candles!** Display candles safely by keeping them in stable, non-flammable holders. Keep these items away from materials that will burn such as other decorations or curtains. Also keep them away from children and pets.
- **Fireplace safety:** Never burn gift wrap or other coated papers or boxes. Burning papers and other improper fuels in the fireplace is a major cause of chimney fires. Always use a firescreen to keep sparks from escaping onto nearby rugs, furniture or other combustibles.
- **Be extra careful when smoking!** Careless smoking is a leading cause of fire deaths at any time of the year, but the risk goes up during holiday parties and gatherings. Check carefully for any smoldering smoking materials (between cushions, under furniture, etc.) before going to bed. Never smoke around the tree or flammable decorations.
- **Have a fire escape plan.** Every family member should know at least **two ways out** of each room, and know to get out of the house whenever the smoke alarm alerts. Decide ahead of time on where to meet once everyone is out. The meeting place should be well-lit and a safe distance out of the way of emergency responders but close enough to be accounted for.
- **Working smoke alarms save lives!** Cold weather—and holidays--can bring increased risk of fire. Having working smoke alarms in your home can double your chances of surviving a fire. If you haven't changed the batteries in your smoke & carbon monoxide alarms this year, now is a good time.

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For more information on home fire safety, visit these websites:

www.nfpa.org

www.homesafetycouncil.org

www.usfa.dhs.gov